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CURRENT TOPICS.

The application of the Chignecto Marine Railway Company for an extension of time, under the conditions of its charter, must have put the Dominion Government confronting the horns of an embarrassing dilemma. On the one hand, in the present state of the finances, and in view of the very heavy obligations already assumed in regard to the Atlantic fast steamship service, and almost as good as assumed with reference to the Pacific cable, to say nothing of minor obligations heavy in the aggregate, it can be taken for granted that they deemed themselves well out of the meshes of this unique undertaking. On the other hand, if the scheme was thoroughly tested, its feasibility demonstrated, and its commercial success reasonably assured before the original pledge was given; if, in other

words, the bargain was made on public grounds which will stand investigation, there is no good reason why the favour now asked by the Company should not be cheerfully granted. It would, in fact, be criminal folly to refuse it. If the construction of the railway, on the terms agreed on, would have been a good thing for the country a year or two ago, it could hardly fail to be a good thing now. Either, then, the Government must now consent to the extension of time asked for, in order that the country may enjoy at the earliest moment the benefit originally promised, or it must stand convicted of having committed the public treasury to a heavy obligation in connection with an enterprise in which its members, in common with very many of the people of the country, have no real faith.

The Liberal press of the Dominion is protesting strongly against the alleged attempts of the Government and its supporters to purchase its constituencies by wholesale, by the voting of very large sums of money as bonuses for railways, for the erection of public buildings, and other purposes, in various constituencies. The Opposition papers in Ontario retort, with effect, by pointing to the similarly large use of indirect wholesale bribes by the local Government for similar purposes, within the limits of its jurisdiction. Both charges have, there is every reason to fear, a great deal too much truth in them. The same evil exists in the other Provinces, as is evident from the eager competition for road and bridge and other sectional appropriations. No one can doubt that this is a most serious evil under our present system, which makes the initiation of money grants, the distribution of patronage, etc., Government prerogatives. If our theory of self-government by means of legislatures chosen by the suffrages of free and independent electors, be a sound and good one, whatever interferes with its proper working must be so far bad and evil. Is it not strange that, amongst all the schemes and restrictions proposed by the Oppositions, almost every session, for the purification of elections and the suppression of bribery, no Opposition has, so far as we are aware, yet proposed any comprehensive reform in this respect, though it would seem that the whole evil might be cured by the simple expedient of having all such money grants, as well as all local official appointments, recommended in the first instance by non-partisan commissions or boards.

It has long been a wonder to on-lookers how a country not naturally abounding in wealth, like Germany, could continue to bear, year after year, the enormous burden imposed by her military policy. The question, it has been felt, must be one of time only. Something must give way under the strain, or else a process of steady deterioration must set in in some department of the national life. In a word, the weight seems to be greater than even the plodding, much-enduring, country-loving Germans can bear up under much longer. According to a statement made by the Prussian Minister of Public Instruction, in a recent address before the Diet, the indications of collapse are beginning to show themselves in the working of a most important part of the State machinery, the Public School system. Attention was directed to this danger three years ago when the school census showed an actual deficiency of 12,652 teachers in the public schools. Nothing has been done to avert the threatened calamity, for which, it is true, more than one cause was assigned, though the chief is admittedly, we believe, the scarcity of funds, due mainly to the enormous and constantly increasing cost of the military system. We have not before us a sufficient abstract of the Minister's speech to enable us to judge either with regard to the exact nature of the threatened collapse, or the proportionate efficacy of the different causes assigned. But the fact that want of funds, undoubtedly, is the most potent factor, is sufficiently suggestive. The threatened decadence of the educational system, of which the Germans are so justly proud, thus boldly proclaimed, must, one would think, arouse the more intelligent and patriotic among the people to determined action, that the schools for the education of their children shall not be sacrificed for the sake of the army.

The reply given by Monsignor Satolli, the Papal ablegate, to an appeal recently made to him as the representative of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, seems to have dealt a very severe blow at the power of the saloon. The appeal was taken from a letter or circular addressed by Bishop Watterson, of Columbus, Ohio, to the priests in his diocese, in which he withdrew "his approbation" from any Catholic society which had a saloon-keeper among its officers; refused in advance such approbation to any new society which had a saloon-keeper among its members; and directed his clergy to refuse absolu-